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January 11, 1957

Professor Sir MacFarlane Burnet  
Royal Melbourne Hospital  
Melbourne, Vic., Australia

Dear Dr. Burnet:

Esther and I very much appreciate your cordial notes of September 23 and the New Year.

One of my principal specific interests in visiting Australia next summer will be the opportunity to get a more detailed indoctrination in your work on the genetics of the influenza virus. I very much enjoyed (and profited from) reading your Principles of Animal Virology last summer. One issue I particularly want to be able to discuss in detail is whether the inheritance of virulence, in contrast to other markers, cannot still be conceived in ~~some~~ mendelian terms, as an alternative to the proposal for an autonomous set of 'virulence' genes. Polygene theories are extremely flexible (so much ~~xxx~~ so that one thinks they can be accommodated to almost any set of data). My objection to the floating genes is not one of principle, since one ought to be on the lookout for unsuspected new mechanisms. However, I don't see why 'virulence' should be considered a unique character: ~~xx~~ avirulent mutants are simply those in which one step of the complete infectious process has been interrupted— an idea very much a corollary of the 'somatic' and 'reproductive' defects mentioned in your letter of September 23. However, I hope we shall have occasion to discuss these matters at some leisure.

From that standpoint, I was somewhat alarmed to receive an invitation to attend the International Polio Congress at Geneva in July. I was by no means sorry to be committed to Melbourne instead, but I foresee this will interrupt our already brief contact next summer. I hope this will not be vitiated altogether.

For the too brief time we will be in Melbourne (you can check with Rubbo on this; c. June 12-August 9, then some weeks elsewhere in Australia) I have no pretensions about the amount of lab-work that will be possible. However, I hope as far as possible to take advantage of your offer of a place at your institute, and someone to work with, for just what you wrote, to get something of the 'feel' of that kind of work. But most of all, I want to get closer access to the raw data, to be able to make a more critical comparative judgment of various systems of recombination.

Syd will have our more detailed plans, in re arrival, and teaching activities.

With best wishes, and eager anticipations,

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg